

CLAIMS AS NOW PRESENTED

1 (**Thrice Amended**). A support belt adapted for encircling and being secured to the waist of a wearer for providing both back and abdominal muscle support during strenuous activity while providing a non-interfering support and a non-interfering fit with the skeletal structure of the ribs and hips of the wearer, the belt comprising:

a. an elongate base having a longitudinal axis and opposite outer ends and of a length sufficient to encircle the waist of the wearer, the base including an enlarged back support area in an intermediate area of the base and [an] enlarged abdominal support areas adjacent the opposite outer ends of the base, each area of a first fixed predetermined vertical height and each area being integral within the base, the areas being disposed within the base such that the areas are opposite one another when the belt is encircling the waist of the wearer, with the abdominal support area covering a portion of the abdomen of the wearer and the back support area covering a portion of the back of the wearer;

b. reduced side areas within the base, having a second predetermined vertical height smaller than said first predetermined vertical height and disposed intermediately of the back support and the abdominal support areas and opposite one another, such that the reduced side areas are positioned opposite one another and between the hips and ribs of the wearer when the belt is encircling the waist, said reduced side areas being sized to allow the belt to be sufficiently tightened against the back and abdominal walls of the wearer without [encountering] interfering with the skeletal structure of the ribs or hips of the wearer, thereby evenly distributing and providing optimum support to both the back and abdominal walls of the wearer and [accommodate] accommodating bending and side-to-side motion of the wearer;

c. an elongate strap having opposite ends of flexible material [axially] having one end secured to the base for defining a secured end of the elongate strap, such that the elongate strap extends along the longitudinal axis of the

base, [having at least one free] the opposite end of the elongate strap extending beyond one of the outer ends of the base for defining a free opposite end of the elongate strap;

d. a first fastener comprising a first pad portion [at one] adjacent the secured end of the elongate strap, and a second pad portion [disposed inwardly of the first pad portion] adjacent the free end of the elongate strap, the first and second pad portions adapted to be placed in overlying, releasably secured relationship with one another; [and]

e. a second fastener comprising a buckle through which the [at least one] end of the elongate strap may pass so as to allow the [first] second pad portion of the first fastener to be placed in overlying contact with the [second] first pad portion of the first fastener; and

f. a cinch slide in the buckle for cinching the elongate strap when it is passed therethrough.

2. (Cancelled).

3. (Twice Amended) The support belt of claim [2] 1, wherein the abdominal support [pad portions] areas of the base, when in overlying relationship with one another, have abutting surfaces, and wherein the first pad portion of the first fastener comprises a hook and loop fastener pad and the second pad portion of the first fastener comprises a complementary hook and loop fastener pad so that the belt may be secured to the waist of the wearer.

4. (Amended) The support belt of claim [2] 1, wherein said back support area and said abdominal support areas are each of approximately five inches in vertical height and the reduced side areas are each of approximately three inches in vertical height.

5.(**Thrice Amended**) The support belt of claim 1, the first fastener further comprising:

a first pad portion at one end of the base and a second pad portion disposed at the other end of the base, the first and second pad portions being adapted to be placed in overlying, releasably secured relationship with one another when the belt is encircling the waist of the wearer;

the first paid portion comprising a first hook and loop fastener pad on one side of the base; and

the second pad portion comprising a second [strap] hook and loop on an opposite side of the base, whereby the [flap means is] the abdominal areas are secured [to the belt] in overlying relationship when the belt is encircling the waist of the wearer.

6. (**Amended**) The support belt of claim 1, further comprising utility rings secured to the belt at the reduced side areas for securing the belt directly to a harness or implement to be moved or lifted by the wearer [that] for providing an ability to use the trunk of the body to aid in the activity with added safety.

7. (**Cancelled**)

8. (**Cancelled**)

9. (**Cancelled**)

10. (**Cancelled**)

11. (**Cancelled**)

12. (**Cancelled**)

13. (Cancelled)

14. (Cancelled)

15. (Cancelled)

16. (Cancelled)

17. (Cancelled)

18. (New) A support belt adapted for encircling and being secured to the waist of a wearer for providing both back and abdominal muscle support during strenuous activity while providing a non-interfering support and a non-interfering fit with the skeletal structure of the ribs and hips of the wearer, the belt comprising:

a. an elongate base having a longitudinal axis and opposite outer ends and of a length sufficient to encircle the waist of the wearer, the base including an enlarged back support area in an intermediate area of the base and enlarged abdominal support areas adjacent the opposite outer ends of the base, each area of a first fixed predetermined vertical height and each area being integral within the base, the areas being disposed within the base such that the areas are opposite one another when the belt is encircling the waist of the wearer, with the abdominal support area covering a portion of the abdomen of the wearer and the back support area covering a portion of the back of the wearer;

b. reduced side areas within the base, having a second predetermined vertical height smaller than said first predetermined vertical height and disposed intermediately of the back support and the abdominal support areas and opposite one another, such that the reduced side areas are positioned opposite one another and between the hips and ribs of the wearer when the belt is encircling the waist, said reduced side areas being

sized to allow the belt to be sufficiently tightened against the back and abdominal walls of the wearer without interfering with the skeletal structure of the ribs or hips of the wearer, thereby evenly distributing and providing optimum support to both the back and abdominal walls of the wearer and accommodating bending and side-to-side motion of the wearer;

c. an elongate strap having opposite ends of flexible material having one end secured to the base for defining a secured end of the elongate strap, such that the elongate strap extends along the longitudinal axis of the base, the opposite end of the elongate strap extending beyond one of the outer ends of the base for defining a free opposite end of the elongate strap;

d. a first fastener comprising a first pad portion adjacent the secured end of the elongate strap, and a second pad portion adjacent the free end of the elongate strap, the first and second pad portions adapted to be placed in overlying, releasably secured relationship with one another, wherein the abdominal support areas of the base, when in overlying relationship with one another, have abutting surfaces, and wherein the first pad portion of the first fastener comprises a hook and loop fastener pad and the second pad portion of the first fastener comprises a complementary hook and loop fastener pad so that the belt may be secured to the waist of the wearer;

e. a second fastener comprising a buckle through which the end of the elongate strap may pass so as to allow the second pad portion of the first fastener to be placed in overlying contact with the first pad portion of the first fastener; and

f. a cinch slide in the buckle for cinching the elongate strap when it is passed therethrough.

19. (New) The support belt of claim 18, the first fastener further comprising:

a first pad portion at one end of the base and a second pad portion disposed at the other end of the base, the first and second pad portions being adapted to be placed in overlying, releasably secured relationship with one another when the belt is encircling the waist of the wearer;

the first pad portion comprising a first hook and loop fastener pad on one side of the base; and

the second pad portion comprising a second [strap] hook and loop on an opposite side of the base, whereby the [flap means is] abdominal areas are secured [to the belt] in overlying relationship when the belt is encircling the waist of the wearer.